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SUBJECT: SOUTHERN SUDAN: Fighting in Jonglei State

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: In a meeting with CG Juba, Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) Minister of Culture, Youth, and Sports John Luc Jok spoke about the recent fighting in the Jonglei area. The minister is from Jonglei state, and has been in contact with all the parties involved. According to Jok, on February 3, fighting broke out during an SPLA mission to disarm locals in Yuai, Jonglei state. The disarmament had been pre-arranged and approved by a local militia leader and village chief. However, many youths, who believed they needed their guns to protect their cattle during the upcoming migration, refused to be disarmed. Local militia ambushed an SPLA force, and a firefight left 60 dead, mostly in the SPLA (Note: some papers have been reporting over 200 dead, while South Sudan Defense Force Chief of Staff Paulino Matip claims only 12 dead. End note.) There have been no reports of retaliation, and the situation is now calm but tense, according to Jok. All sides will meet in a conference to try to resolve outstanding issues. End Summary.

Disagreement over Disarming

¶2. (U) During a conference with the SPLA/SSDF in January, local Dinka and Nuer chiefs agreed to disarmament of non-military personnel, with regional security provided by a united SPLA/SSDF force. The SPLA decided began with Nuer cattle herders around Yuai, the area from which the "White Army" originates (Note: the original White Army was responsible for the Bor massacre in 1991, although it is unclear what relationship this group in Yuai shares with that White Army, if any. End note.) This force of 1,200 went in after receiving permission from the White Army commander on the ground, Lt. Col. Yousef Biliu, and the local chief.

¶3. (U) Although Nuer leaders had approved, young Nuer men from the area decided not to disarm. With Yuai completely dry, these herders were planning a seasonal migration to Ayod and Bor, and they believed they would need their weapons to protect their cattle from theft by the Merle in Ayod and the Dinka in Bor, neither of whom had been disarmed. After an initial argument between local armed herders with SPLA advance officers in a local market, a larger SPLA contingent arrived, expecting no trouble. Upon arrival, the locals, joined by members of the White Army and affiliated elements of the South Sudan Defense Force (SSDF), attacked the arriving SPLA group. According to Jok, the ensuing firefight left at least 60 dead, mostly from the SPLA. Not all casualties were from direct combat, as some SPLA troops fled into the bush, became lost, and subsequently died of thirst. Several SPLA troops were captured, but have since been released.

Gatwick Called to Restore Order; Nuer Prophet Killed

14. (SBU) UNMIS coordinator for the south, James Ellery, agreed to fly Major General Simon Gatwick, a former White Army commander who has now joined the SPLA but had periodically been allied with the SSDF, to mediate in Yuai. Gatwick, who has great influence in the region, defused the situation and managed to bring the detained SPLA officers back to Juba.

15. (U) The Nuer prophet Wut Nyang Garakek was killed while taking part in the mediation effort. Reputedly a member of the White Army who led the troops on the ground during the Bor Massacre, Nyang believed he still had influence in the area. However, last year, a different self-proclaimed prophet had led a group of Nuer from Jonglei to the "Promised Land" near Akobo, and established a cult that engaged in strange rituals, such as women walking around naked. After this experience, Minister Yok reported that Nyang was killed because the already overwrought locals were no longer tolerant of such prophets.

The Way Forward

16. (SBU) General Gatwich is in Juba assembling a delegation of pastors, SPLA, SSDF, and the governor of Jonglei, with plans to return to Yuai to help defuse the situation and find a durable solution to permit the Nuer migration. The Merle and Dinka have heard about the SPLA ambush, and reportedly have said that they would attack armed Yuai cattle herders who come to Ayod or Bor. Migration is essential for the survival of thirsty Yuai

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cattle. Current plans are for a robust SSDF/SPLA force to secure the area, disarm, and provide protection for the Nuer. Gatwich also plans to meet with the local armed elements to explain the Juba Declaration and regarding their commanders' decision to join the SPLA, which seems to be poorly understood. SPLA soldiers involved in the original incident have reportedly been called back to Juba for an investigation of what happened and who started it.

Stirring the Pot

17. (SBU) COMMENT: Minister Jok's detailed account of the events in Jonglei matches other credible accounts. On February 7, SSDF Chief of Staff Paulino Matip held a press conference in Khartoum and gave a similar story (only the casualty count varied). A spokesperson for Gordon Kong has claimed that it was a larger massacre of over 200 civilians, including women and children, as part of an effort to neutralize the "new" SSDF. His account claimed that SPLA forces are roaming the area, robbing and killing with impunity. However, he is an unreliable source. The locals that the SPLA were attempting to disarm had not joined Kong's forces, and in fact had joined, theoretically, the SPLA. The National Congress Party (NCP) has cited Kong's account of events and called for a full investigation of this "CPA violation." Jok claims this is another case of the North blowing an incident out of proportion to "stir the pot." Southern Sudan remains a highly charged stew of tribes, militias, cattle raiders, prophets, and profiteers, so future incidents, exaggerated press reports, and ongoing accusations are likely to continue.

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